

# COUNTY OF YORK

## MEMORANDUM

**DATE:** April 4, 2000

**TO:** York County Planning Commission

**FROM:** Timothy C. Cross, AICP, Senior Planner

**SUBJECT:** Zoning Ordinance Review – Article VI, Off-Street Parking and Loading

### **INTRODUCTION**

As part of the Zoning Ordinance review and revision process that is currently underway, staff has reviewed Article VI, Off-Street Parking and Loading. In conducting this review, staff has consulted the zoning ordinances of other high-growth suburban counties in Virginia<sup>1</sup> and reviewed some of the planning literature on the subject of parking. (A list of references that have been consulted appears at the end of this memorandum.) Drawing from this research, as well as from information learned at various workshops attended in the past few years, staff has prepared the following analysis of the County's parking regulations. Upon direction of the Planning Commission, staff will further develop, in the form of draft ordinance language, those concepts – whether discussed herein or initiated by the Commission – that the Commission deems worthy of further consideration. The purpose of this memorandum is not to make detailed recommendations but rather to identify what staff sees as shortcomings in the County's parking ordinance and outline some general concepts designed to address them.

### **ISSUES**

1. **Statement of Purpose and Intent.** What goals should the County try to achieve through its parking regulations? Two fundamental goals of any parking ordinance are 1) to provide for safe and efficient on-site parking and circulation for all development in the County, and 2) to prevent on-street parking on adjacent roadways. Less obvious but no less important is the goal of seeking a desirable balance between the built environment and the natural environment. This would encompass environmental and aesthetic objectives – such as landscaping, stormwater management, and visual appeal – that should apply to *all* development in the County. A parking lot is a land use and should be held to the same standards of quality as other types of development. Parking lots typically occupy more land area than the buildings they serve and therefore have a strong visual impact – positive or negative – on the development site.

A statement of purpose articulating these goals would be useful for this article so that readers will understand the goals that the County's parking regulations are designed to achieve. Like several other articles of the Zoning Ordinance, Article VI does not include such a statement.

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<sup>1</sup> Albemarle, Chesterfield, Henrico, James City, Loudoun, Prince William, Spotsylvania, and Stafford.

2. **Numerical parking standards.** One deficiency of the County's numerical off-street parking requirements is their failure to incorporate all of the permitted uses listed in the Zoning Ordinance Table of Land Uses (§24.1-306). In some cases, such as accessory apartments, home occupations, and temporary uses, parking standards are set forth in the performance standards or other relevant sections of the Zoning Ordinance. There are also other uses – such as campgrounds, commercial stables, and truck stops – that require a Special Use Permit wherever they are permitted. Since parking standards for these uses would be established through Use Permit conditions, they are not included in the list below. The following uses, however, are not covered:

- Plant nursery/greenhouse
- Commercial orchard/vineyard
- Post office
- Animal shelter
- Conference center<sup>2</sup>
- Parks/athletic fields (civic, semi-public, and public)
- Correctional facility (County Jail)
- Health, exercise, fitness center<sup>3</sup>
- Broadcasting studio
- Barber/beauty shop<sup>4</sup>
- Apparel services (laundromat, tailor, etc.)<sup>5</sup>
- Photo studio
- Freestanding ATM
- Household items repair
- Tool, household equipment, lawn and garden rental establishment
- Establishments providing printing, photocopying, blueprinting, mailing, fax reception and transmission or similar business services to the general public and business and professional users
- Professional pharmacy
- Auto repair garage/Auto body work and painting<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> The Zoning Ordinance does not define "Conference Center." Perhaps it could be considered under the "Auditorium, gymnasium, arena, convention hall" category, which requires one parking space for every four fixed seats plus one space for every 60 square feet of assembly area without fixed seats.

<sup>3</sup> There are, however, specific parking standards for recreational establishments not specifically listed, as well as standards for community swimming pools and community tennis, handball, or racquet courts. There is some ambiguity as to the standards that would be applied to a health and fitness center.

<sup>4</sup> There is a discrepancy in the Zoning Ordinance with regard to barber/beauty shops, which are included in the definition of "Personal Service Establishments" but are listed separately in the Table of Land Uses. Personal Service Establishments are defined as "establishments primarily engaged in the repair, care of, maintenance or customizing of personal properties that are worn or carried about the person or are a physical component of the person, including barber shops, beauty parlors, laundering, cleaning and other garment services, tailors, shoe repair, and similar establishments." In the Table of Land Uses, however, fortune tellers, tattoo parlors, and pawn shops are cited as examples of "Personal Services," which are only permitted with a Special Use Permit in the GB zoning district, while barber/beauty shops are permitted as a matter of right in GB and several other business and industrial districts.

<sup>5</sup> The same discrepancy discussed in footnote 1 above applies to "apparel services," which are listed separately but contained within the definition of Personal Service Establishments.

<sup>6</sup> This might be considered materially similar to "Vehicle sales, rental, and service establishments," for which two spaces are required per service bay plus one space per employee.

- Wholesale auction establishment/Wholesale trade establishment

With regard to those land uses for which there *are* parking requirements, which is the vast majority of uses, York County's minimum parking requirements are fairly consistent with general planning practice. The table below compares York County's shopping center, general retail, and office parking requirements with those of other high-growth suburban counties in Virginia. All but one – Albemarle – are along the so-called “urban crescent” stretching from Northern Virginia through the Richmond area to Hampton Roads. Also included in this table for the sake of comparison are various published parking standards, including parking generation rates published by the Institute of Transportation Engineers (ITE)<sup>7</sup> and a model subdivision and site plan ordinance published by Rutgers University's Center for Urban Policy Research.<sup>8</sup>

<b>TABLE 1: SELECTED MINIMUM PARKING REQUIREMENTS (Spaces Per 1,000 Square Feet of Floor Area)</b>			
	<b>Shopping Center</b>	<b>Retail</b>	<b>Office Buildings</b>
<b>Albemarle</b>	5.5	10.0 for up to 5,000 SF and 1.0 for each 200 SF above 5,000	5.0
<b>Chesterfield</b>	4.4	5.0	4.0
<b>Fairfax</b>	4.3 ( $\leq 100,000$ SF)	5.0 for the first 1,000 SF plus 6.0 per each additional 1,000 SF	3.6 ( $\leq 50,000$ SF)
	4.0 (100,001- 400,000 SF)		3.0 (50,001 – 125,000 SF)
	5.0 plus 6 per additional 1,000 SF ( $> 400,000$ SF)		2.6 ( $\geq 125,000$ SF)
<b>Henrico</b>	4.0	5.0	4.0
<b>James City</b>	4.0 ( $\leq 300,000$ SF)	5.0	4.0
	4.5 ( $> 300,000$ SF)		
<b>Loudoun</b>	4.0 ( $\leq 100,000$ SF)	4.0	4.0 for the first 30,000 SF and 3.3 thereafter
	3.5 (malls $\leq 400,000$ SF)		
	3.8 (malls with 400,000 – 600,000 SF)		
	4.25 (malls $> 600,000$ SF)		
<b>Prince William</b>	See listing for Retail	5.0 for the first 50,000 SF, plus 1 per 225 SF for each additional 1,000 SF up to 300,000, plus 1 per 250 SF for each additional 1,000 SF thereafter	4.0
<b>Spotsylvania</b>	4.5 ( $\leq 100,000$ SF)	4.5	3.4
	4.3 (100,001-400,000 SF)		
	4.0 ( $> 400,000$ SF)		
<b>Stafford</b>	See listing for Retail	3.0 (low intensity)	3.0
		4.0 (medium intensity)	
		7.0 (high intensity)	
<b>YORK</b>	3.0 ( $< 10,000$ SF)	5.0	3.4
	4.0 ( $\geq 10,000$ SF)		
<b>ITE Average Rate</b>	3.97		2.79
<b>Rutgers Model Ordinance</b>	4.0 ( $< 400,000$ SF)	5.0	4.5 ( $< 50,000$ SF)
	4.5 (400,000-599,999 SF)		4.0 (50,000-99,999 SF)

<sup>7</sup> Institute of Transportation Engineers, Parking Generation, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition, 1987

<sup>8</sup> David Listokin and Carole Walker, The Subdivision and Site Plan Handbook, Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, 1989

	5.0 (≥600,000 SF)	3.5 (≥100,000 SF)
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As the table shows, York County's parking requirements are consistent with, and in many cases lower than, those of other comparable counties in Virginia. Nevertheless, anyone who does not think that too much parking is being built in the county should ask himself or herself one question: When was the last time you had difficulty finding a parking space in the County? Chances are it was the day before Christmas, the day after Thanksgiving, or July 4<sup>th</sup> in Yorktown. Of course many businesses, particularly large retail operations, want to have as much parking as possible in order to accommodate as many customers as possible. Village Square (a.k.a. Super Kmart) Shopping Center – where 71% more spaces were built than were required – is an illustrative example. However, the retailer's desire to supply enough parking to meet the highest possible demand must be balanced against the community's goals with regard to aesthetics, the natural environment, and the overall quality of life. Excessive parking is a wasteful and inefficient use of (often valuable commercial) land and exacerbates stormwater management problems, contributing to the degradation of the Chesapeake Bay through the creation of vast areas of impervious asphalt. Furthermore, excess parking areas are often converted to outdoor storage and sales areas, which can impede on-site circulation and detract from the aesthetics of the site.

That York County's parking requirements are already among the lowest for high-growth suburban counties in Virginia does not mean that they cannot or should not be lowered even further. The transportation engineers who perform parking studies are the first ones to admit that the estimation of parking demand is far from an exact science. A 1997 article in Planning magazine noted that "Many local governments set their policies by watching what their neighbors do, or by relying on estimates from national sources, such as the Institute of Transportation Engineers' Transportation Planning Handbook and Parking Generation Manual", but "(a)lthough the ITE handbook suggests that local surveys are the most important tools for determining actual parking needs, these surveys rarely get done. Instead, communities settle on a formula: typically four parking spaces for 1,000 square feet of land use."<sup>9</sup> For general office buildings, for example, the ITE's Parking Generation specifies an average rate of 2.79 peak parking spaces occupied per thousand square feet of building area, based on a sample of 141 parking studies. The *range* of rates, however, is astonishingly wide, from a low of 0.75 to a high of 32.93 spaces per thousand square feet.<sup>10</sup>

In accordance with the ITE's recommendation that *local* data be collected for comparison when considering use of the data in the Parking Generation manual, staff conducted site inspections at various parking lots on a recent Saturday afternoon<sup>11</sup> and counted the number of parked cars. The purpose was to quantify the level of parking demand for a representative sample of major commercial developments in the County. The results appear in Table 2 below. Staff found that, for the six major commercial

<sup>9</sup> Lisa Wormser, "Don't Even Think of Parking Here," Planning, Volume 63, Number 6 (June 1997), pp. 10-11.

<sup>10</sup> Institute of Transportation Engineers, Parking Generation, p.104.

<sup>11</sup> Counts were taken on Saturday, March 25, 2000, between 11:45 a.m. and 2:40 p.m.

developments observed, there was at least one empty space for each occupied space. Village Square (a.k.a. Super Kmart) Shopping Center, *would* have been an exception if just the 985 spaces that were required had been built, in which case the parking utilization rate would have been 63.1% instead of 36.9%. These results, while not probative, are strongly suggestive that even York County's "low" parking requirements are higher than they need to be to accommodate parking demand.

<b>TABLE 2: YORK COUNTY PARKING STATISTICS FOR SELECT COMMERCIAL DEVELOPMENTS<sup>12</sup></b>					
<b>DEVELOPMENT</b>	<b>TOTAL PARKING SPACES</b>		<b>PARKING SPACES UTILIZED</b>		
	<b>Number</b>	<b>Ratio</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Ratio</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Big Kmart Shopping Center (Kingsgate Greene)	561	1:250	263	1:534	46.9%
Farm Fresh Shopping Center (in front of building only)	348	1:198	136	1:588	39.1%
James York Plaza (excluding Enterprise Rent-a-Car)	560	1:202	132	1:967	23.6%
Lowe's	708	1:190	224	1:603	31.6%
The Shoppes at Yorktown (Winn-Dixie)	298	1:250	90	1:828	30.2%
Village Square Shopping Center (Super Kmart)	1,684	1:147	622	1:396	36.9%

Staff is of the opinion that York County can reduce its minimum parking requirements from 5.0 to 4.0 spaces per thousand square feet of floor area for general retail and from 3.4 to 3.0 spaces per thousand square feet for office buildings without creating any parking shortages. Three of the nine comparable counties (Loudoun, Spotsylvania, and Stafford) have lower retail parking requirements than York, and two of the nine (Stafford and Fairfax) have lower office parking requirements. The County could also establish a sliding scale for these parking requirements to provide for further reductions for large developments. This is common practice for shopping centers, and several counties (Albemarle, Prince William, Fairfax, and Loudoun) follow a similar practice for general retail and/or office development. In addition to reducing the parking requirements, there are several potential ways for the County to address the problem of excessive parking areas:

- a) Establish *maximum* parking standards. The major disadvantage of this approach is that it places great faith in the numerical calculation of parking requirements, which, as noted above, is not an exact science.
- b) Increase the required amount of parking lot landscaping – both the total percentage and the number of plantings – for any developer who wants to build more than the minimum required number of parking spaces. This approach gives the developer flexibility while creating a clear incentive not to build excessive amounts of parking. Furthermore, there is a clear, logical nexus between the requirement (additional landscaping) and the goal to be achieved (less visually obtrusive parking lots).

<sup>12</sup> Parking ratios in this table represent the number of parking spaces per 1,000 square feet of floor area.

- c) Require developers to defer the construction of a certain percentage of the required parking until it is needed. Prince William County permits such deferrals whereby *“up to 50% of the required spaces may be deferred provided there is sufficient areas, as shown on the site plan, to construct the deferred spaces, and provided a written agreement, binding on all present and future property owners, is submitted stating that the deferred spaces shall be constructed when, in the opinion of the Director of Public Works and the Zoning Administrator, such construction becomes necessary.”* York County has a similar provision (§24.1-606(b)), but instead of encouraging parking deferrals, it effectively discourages them by requiring *“a site- and use-specific parking analysis and plan prepared by a professional qualified to perform such studies”* that is *“based on parking loads at comparable local uses or establishments taken within six (6) months of the date of submission and shall include comparisons with Institute of Transportation Engineers (ITE) document and manuals.”*

For small businesses, particularly on constrained sites, parking space deferrals could be very attractive, but for larger retailers (e.g., Super Kmart, Lowe's, et al) and shopping center developers who want to build extra parking, the voluntary approach serves no purpose. That is the principal weakness of the Prince William (and York County) approach, which relies on the developer to request a parking deferral. A more effective approach, one that would achieve the goal of preventing unnecessary parking, would *require* the developer to set aside an open grassy area for future parking to be developed only at such time as the County determines that it is needed. This approach actually *reduces* the amount of parking below the minimum standard while maintaining much-needed flexibility should parking demand estimates prove to be incorrect.

3. **Parking standards for mixed-use developments.** §24.1-606(a)(5) of the Zoning Ordinance states that *“except for shopping centers, in the case of mixed uses including mixed uses within a single building, the parking spaces required shall equal the sum of the parking space requirements of the various uses computed separately.”* This requirement does not recognize the fact that a chief benefit of mixed-use developments is their functional and physical integration. Indeed, one of the principal features of a well-designed mixed-use development is a system of walkways connecting different uses with one another. Furthermore, it should be noted that peak parking periods for different uses do not necessarily overlap. For example, on an average weekday, parking demand for office space peaks at 11:00 a.m. and declines sharply around 5:00 p.m. just as housing and retail parking demand is increasing.

*“There is a great deal of concern about the parking generation characteristics of multi-use projects,”* according to the ITE. *“Specifically, questions have been raised about whether the parking generation characteristics of multi-use projects are the same as for the single-use projects that compose the project. It appears reasonable to assume that multi-use projects would potentially demand fewer parking spaces, because of the internal matching of trip ends within the project. In addition, one trip to a multi-use*

project could satisfy a number of trip purposes at the same time.”<sup>13</sup> For example, in its 1983 report entitled Shared Parking, the Urban Land Institute (ULI) found that an average of 28% of the employees at mixed-use sites were also patrons in the same or nearby development. Moreover, one survey of eight hotels found that three-quarters of the guests also patronized nearby retail establishments and/or restaurants.<sup>14</sup>

There is nothing uncommon about the cumulative approach to mixed-use parking requirements. Most if not all of the high-growth suburban counties have the same requirement as York County, but one of these counties – Henrico – provides for reductions for mixed-use developments (to no fewer than 70% of the total parking spaces otherwise required when computed separately for each use). An area large enough to accommodate the parking space reduction must be reserved in case additional parking is necessitated by a change in use or an increase in parking demand. Henrico specifies very clearly the types of uses that must be included in a mixed-use development in order to qualify for a parking reduction. In addition, to ensure pedestrian accessibility, Henrico requires that the reduced number of parking spaces be located within 400 feet of the building to be served.

The larger issue here is shared parking, not just for mixed-use developments but for non-residential development in general. Does it make sense to require a new store or office building to have its own full-size parking lot when right next door – within walking distance – is another business that has vacant parking spaces during much if not all of the day? Like most localities, York County makes provisions for shared parking arrangements without actually encouraging them. Specifically, §24.1-602(a)(2) of the ordinance gives the Zoning Administrator authority to permit a reduction in required parking for “cooperative” parking locations that provide parking for two or more uses, the burden is on the developer to “establish the appropriateness of such a reduction.” The County should have the authority to require shared parking arrangements – and to reduce parking space requirements administratively – for new development when parking is already available nearby.

#### 4. **Parking Lot Design.**

- a) **Dimensions of parking spaces.** The Zoning Ordinance requires parking spaces (other than parallel spaces) to have minimum dimensions of 9 feet by 18 feet; spaces specifically designated for employees only can be as small as 8 feet by 16 feet. This is a fairly common standard. Less common, however, is the Zoning Ordinance requirement that “*vehicular overhang over landscape areas shall not be counted toward the minimum dimensions*” set forth in §24.1-604(c). According to at least one source<sup>15</sup>, where cars are parked perpendicular to a curb or wheel stop, the curb should be 2½ feet from the front of the parking stall; in other words, the vehicular overhang *should* be counted. This would result in a *paved* parking stall

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid, p. ix.

<sup>14</sup> Urban Land Institute, Shared Parking, 1983.

<sup>15</sup> Vergil G. Stover and Frank J. Koepke, Transportation and Land Development, Institute of Transportation Engineers, Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1987.

length of 15½ feet for these spaces, reducing impervious surface and facilitating the installation of landscaped dividers (see below) since a portion of the “green area” would be counted toward the parking requirements.

Another area of the parking space dimensional standards that may be worth revisiting is §24.1-609(c), which allows the developer to designate up to 40% of the parking spaces for the use of compact cars. Casual observation suggests that compact cars in the County are greatly outnumbered not just by standard mid-size cars but by pick-up trucks, mini-vans, and sport utility vehicles. It is not realistic to expect as many as 40% of the spaces in any parking lot to be utilized by compact cars. Prince William, for example, sets an upper limit of 20% on the proportion of parking spaces that can be designated for compact cars. Staff does not expect a reduction in compact car allowances to have a significant effect on impervious surface; the compact car provisions are typically utilized only when the developer is having difficulty providing the required parking (often on constrained sites).

- b) **Landscaping.** General landscaping requirements in the County are addressed in a separate section of the Zoning Ordinance (Article II, Division 4, Landscaping, Buffer, and Greenbelt Regulations), whereas the parking ordinance addresses certain landscaping issues specific to parking lots, such as landscaped traffic islands. The County requires that a minimum of 7.5% of the total surface area in parking lots be landscaped (§24.1-609(b)(4); this is consistent with general planning practice, where 5%-10% is considered a fairly standard range.<sup>16</sup> Where the landscaping provisions of the Zoning Ordinance are not having their desired effect is in the area of plantings, specifically tree plantings. Section 24.1-609(b)(10) states that “*All parking lots shall be visually screened from public street rights-of-way by means of landscaping which provides a visual screen of the parking lot throughout the year,*” but there is very little visible evidence that this requirement is being followed. Stronger, more specific language may be needed.

Not included anywhere in the Zoning Ordinance is a requirement for landscaped dividers within parking lots. Despite the absence of a requirement, however, the use of landscaped dividers appears to be a common but not universal practice for large parking lots in the County (Lowe’s being one notable exception). Well-landscaped dividers not only improve the appearance of a parking lot but also improve safety by preventing high-speed diagonal movements within the parking lot. They also provide a location for lighting, thereby eliminating the installation of light standards on unprotected concrete pillars, which are often hit by vehicles. Such dividers should be used at least every third parking module.<sup>17</sup> (A parking module consists of a parking aisle with parking space on both sides.)

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<sup>16</sup> Listokin and Walker, p. 264, and Harvey Moskowitz and Carl Lindbloom, A Guide for Residential Design Review (Trenton, NJ: New Jersey Department of Community Affairs, 1976), p. 126.

<sup>17</sup> Stover and Koepke.



- c) **Parking aisle length.** According to the ITE's Transportation and Land Development, parking aisles should not exceed 300-350 feet without a break for circulation. This will establish a more efficient search pattern for spaces, eliminate high speeds, and reduce concentrations of vehicles on the perimeter road adjacent to the building.<sup>18</sup> As with the landscaped dividers discussed above, developers generally appear to be following the 300-foot standard even in the absence of a Zoning Ordinance requirement.
- d) **Walking distance.** Section 24.1-602(b) of the Zoning Ordinance requires customer parking spaces for commercial development to be within 750 feet of the main entrance to the building. Most counties that have walking distance requirements – including Albemarle, Fairfax, and Loudoun – set the limit at 500 feet. In addition to facilitating customer safety and convenience, reducing the walking distance would be another way to prevent the over-building of parking lots.
- e) **Shopping cart receptacles.** It is common practice for grocery stores and large retailers to provide areas within their parking lots for customers to return their shopping carts. This facilitates safe and convenient on-site circulation as well as improving aesthetics by reducing the number of shopping carts strewn about the parking lot. These receptacles should be made a Zoning Ordinance requirement for parking lots serving large retail developments.
- f) **Outdoor storage.** Staff is of the opinion that no portion of the parking lot may be used for outdoor storage or sales unless it is shown as such on an approved site plan. The County's current practice has been to prohibit outdoor storage from encroaching on any *required* parking area, but there are no provisions in effect to prevent the developer from exceeding the parking requirements and then using the excess parking for outdoor storage. As noted earlier, this can hinder internal circulation and detract from site aesthetics. Staff believes that any and all proposed areas for outdoor storage must be shown on the site plan to ensure conformance with the County site design standards.

## **CONCLUSION**

Zoning Ordinance parking standards can be divided into two basic categories: number of spaces and how those spaces are arranged. With regard to the number of spaces, York County's parking space requirements are relatively low, but empirical evidence, regional comparisons, and national planning literature all suggest that even these relatively low requirements are higher than they need to be. In addition to lowering the number of required spaces, there are other actions available to the County – such as shared parking, parking space deferrals, and landscaping tradeoffs – that can achieve similar results. The groundwork for some of these tools in York County is already in place; what is required to put them into use is, to a certain extent, a simple shift in emphasis.

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

There are also things the County can do to improve the layout of parking lots to make them safer and more attractive. No matter how large they are, parking lots can be properly landscaped so that they blend in with the natural environment and are not so visually obtrusive from the road and from surrounding properties.

## **REFERENCES**

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